

Leon Panetta and the Center for Strategic and International Studies have turned to her as an expert and adviser, because she knows that we can't protect ourselves at home without a robust strategy abroad.

Throughout her career, she has proven to be a pragmatic and solutions-focused public servant by working across the aisle and with stakeholders from different States and industries in the United States to find ways to protect our oceans and our ocean economy.

After the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, Monica collaborated with five Republican Governors of affected States to get \$1 billion in restoration funds from oil company BP so that States could quickly stop rebounding from the disaster.

Her work at NOAA was praised by groups like the Seafood Harvesters of America, who support her experience and legacy of protecting our oceans and the workers and communities that depend upon them.

Louis Pasteur once said:

Science knows no country, because knowledge belongs to humanity, and is the torch which illuminates the world. Science is the highest personification of the nation because that nation will remain the first which carries the furthest the works of thought and intelligence.

Monica Medina has dedicated her career to promoting America's excellence in these two realms—the tools of science and the values of humanity—because it is there where America's promise to the world can be found.

I want to reiterate very strongly that she has served every mission, she has fulfilled every goal that she has been given, and every discussion that she has ever had has always resulted in people holding us in the highest regard by the key stakeholders in every issue she has touched. I want to reiterate my strong support for her nomination and hope my colleagues will join me in confirming her for this important position.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent, notwithstanding rule XXII, that upon the use or yielding back of time on the Donfried nomination, the Senate vote on the motions to invoke cloture on the Medina, Phee, Robinson, and Lewis nominations; that if closure is invoked on any of the nominations listed, all postcloture time be considered expired and the vote on confirmation of those nominations occur at a time and in an order to be determined by the majority leader, following consultation with the Republican leader, with 1 hour for debate equally divided prior to each vote, and the Republican debate be controlled by Senator CRUZ.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MURPHY. For the information of the Senate, we expect four rollcall

votes beginning at around 8 p.m. Those votes will be cloture on the Medina, Phee, Robinson, and Lewis nominations.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I am glad that we are coming to some conclusion this evening with respect to a handful of the long list of pending nominations for the State Department and the Department of Defense, but it is a small portion of a list that is growing bigger and bigger.

Never before has a first-term President had this few national security nominees in place by the fall of his first year. And this is a growing national security crisis imposed on the country by Republicans who have decided to put their hatred of Democrats and this President ahead of the security of this country—above the security of this Nation.

And it just takes a lot of hutzpah for my colleagues to stand here on the floor and criticize the President's conduct of foreign policy at the same time that they are refusing to allow the President to have staff to conduct foreign policy. Let me say that again. We have all sorts of Republicans coming down here and savaging the President's policy on Afghanistan or on China or on Russia, but then, at the exact same time, taking extraordinary steps to prevent the President from having anybody actually implement policies toward Afghanistan or Russia or China. It is akin to standing up in a restaurant and complaining about how slow the service is right after you went and barricaded the doors in and out of the kitchen.

My colleagues can't have it both ways. If you want to complain about the President's policies toward China, then stop standing in the way of allowing him to have personnel that can execute on sound policy. Stop standing in the way of the Assistant Secretary who will oversee policy in the region.

You have complaints about Afghanistan. Then why are we continuing to block those who would be in charge of refugee policy and in charge of resettlement policy to get more Afghans out of the country?

You have complaints about Russia. Well, for a month Republicans have been blocking the key personnel who oversee policy toward Russia, whether it be the Assistant Secretary for Europe or our Ambassador to NATO.

Here is what voters are left to wonder: Are these sincere objections based upon policy or is this really about an intentional effort to try to undermine the security of this country in order to damage Joe Biden?

I don't know the answer to that question, but I can't figure out any plausible reason how this benefits the country. Never before—never before—has a minority gone to these lengths to try to undermine a President's national security team.

Every single Democrat had massive objections, moral and practical, to

President Trump's foreign policy, but not a single one of us contemplated doing what our Republican colleagues are doing right now—holding up every single one of Donald Trump's Ambassadors and nominees—because we knew that that would undermine the security of the country, because there are differences that we have, but there are far more points of agreement where midlevel civil servants and Ambassadors are carrying out policies on behalf of America that Republicans and Democrats agree on.

Here is the list of nominees that are stuck. What does the Chief of Protocol have to do with Nord Stream 2? What does the Ambassador to Vietnam have to do with the objections of the Senator from Texas over an oil pipeline? Why are we blocking the Assistant Administrator for the U.S. Agency for International Development?

Nothing that is happening here has anything to do with the security of this country.

So I am glad we are unlocking a handful of nominees, but we are going to be here on Thursdays and Fridays and Saturdays and Sundays. I am going to advocate that we stay as long as it takes in order to protect this country, in order to stop this unprecedented blockade of the people who do the work of standing up for the security of this Nation every single day.

One of the critiques that has been lodged here today is about the President's proposal and his execution of his proposal to wind down the 20-year war in Afghanistan. In fact, one of my colleagues said that until the Secretary of State resigns, he will continue to block all Department of Defense and State Department nominees, knowing that that is not going to happen.

So I do want to spend a few minutes this evening talking about the real story behind President Biden's decision to bring a 20-year war that has cost this country \$2 trillion, has cost this Nation thousands of lives, and has ended up in hundreds of thousands of Afghans being killed—let's just be very clear at the outset. President Biden's decision to bring U.S. troops home from Afghanistan is wildly popular—supported by three out of four Americans. And I want to talk about the danger of what has happened over the course of the last 2 months with this critique of the President's withdrawal plan. Some of it is legitimate, but some of it is really dangerous.

So, in 2009, President Obama planned to send a whole bunch of additional troops into Afghanistan. It was Obama's surge—the idea that we would plus-up our troops there. We would partner with diplomats and aid administrators. It was a means to try to conquer and then hold territory in Afghanistan that had been taken by the Taliban.

It was a really good plan. It had all kinds of counterinsurgency buzz words. The PowerPoint looked really sharp. And it was endorsed by a lot of smart

foreign policy thinkers. But then it was a total flop. It didn't work. I saw it in person.

In 2011, I went out to a small town in western Afghanistan, where the surge was taking place, where a group of U.S. soldiers had taken back territory that had been previously controlled by the Taliban. We got a tour of this small town called Parmakan, and the elders in that town told us that the Taliban forced them to grow poppy. Poppy, then, was given or sold to the Taliban and used to fuel and fund the Taliban's insurgency against the United States.

And now that the U.S. troops were there, poppy was still being grown in the fields. It was still being sold to the Taliban. The difference was that now the Taliban wasn't stealing it. The Taliban was paying a fairer price for the poppy, but we were still protecting the fields, a crop that was being sold to our enemy to finance the insurgency against us. It was a very clear, concrete example of how a plan that looked really good on paper wasn't playing out to our national security benefit in reality.

Afghanistan wasn't a failure of execution. It was a failure of hubris. We came to believe that we could do something in Afghanistan that was, in reality, unachievable, though, on paper, achievable. This idea that we could build an American-style democracy and an American-style military on the other side of the world amidst a culture we did not understand turned out to be an impossibility.

But general after general, administration after administration, we refused to accept that reality. We believed that America could accomplish this feat, despite the fact that year after year, especially in the last decade, the Taliban got stronger and the amount of territory they conquered was bigger. The ability of the Afghan military and government to be able to deliver services and protect the people became less and less.

One would think that the overnight collapse of the Afghan Government security forces on the 15th of August would have finally broken the back of this American "execute better" thinking, this belief that if we just fine-tune the plan once again, we will be able to do the impossible. But it is clear that, in fact, the opposite had happened; that since the fall of the Afghan Government and military, there has been new life infused into the architects and the cheerleaders of American military hubris's arguments.

The scenes from the Kabul airport in the weeks following the Afghan Government's disintegration, they were devastating to watch. The stories of young girls and human rights activists desperately clamoring for a route out of the country, they were heart-breaking to hear. But the idea that the United States of America, a country located on the other side of the world from Kabul, could manage this unexpected collapse in a way that didn't

produce panic and confusion or that we would be able to evacuate and find a home outside of the country for every Afghan who wanted to leave—it was, unfortunately, the same kind of magical thinking that got us into this mess in the first place and that kept us there for 10 years too long. It is just as illusory as the now-proven fantasy trumpeted by war hawks that America could build and train an Afghan Government and military into a new version of their American counterparts. And we risk falling into this trap again, believing that America can do things abroad that are beyond our reach.

There are plenty of fights that are winnable. There is plenty of good that America can do. But there are limits, especially limits to our authority when we are leading with military intervention.

There are no doubts there were mistakes made throughout the period of evacuation of U.S. forces and diplomats from Afghanistan. There is no way you run a mission that complicated without going back and finding things that you would have done differently.

But in the end, we got 130,000 people out. That is the single biggest airlift of Americans and partners, certainly, in our lifetime and likely in the history of this country.

It is hard to argue with those results in the end—130,000 Americans and Afghans taken out in a period of 2 weeks, when America controlled only the airport and no territory around it because of the disintegration of the Afghan military.

But for many in Washington, many in the foreign policy consensus, many of the folks who want to stay in Afghanistan forever, they say 130,000 wasn't good enough. But what is their specific complaint?

Some of them say that the scenes at the airport of chaos was Joe Biden's fault. That is maybe the most nonsensical of the arguments because once the Afghan military and government fell apart overnight, there was nothing that a couple thousand American troops and diplomats were going to be able to do to prevent that chaos.

You can argue that the United States should have seen that collapse coming, but the Afghan people didn't have access to our intelligence. The Afghan people didn't know that that was all going to fall apart overnight. And so, of course, when they heard that the United States was running flights out of Kabul, there was going to be a mad rush to the airport. It just doesn't make any sense to suggest that a couple thousand Americans inside Afghanistan were going to be able to prevent some very chaotic scenes on the ground.

Other critics set a lower bar. They say that, well, the President couldn't have prevented the chaos, but he should have managed the evacuation better.

Again, I will concede that there are things that could have been done bet-

ter. But let's just talk about what the scene looked like on the ground. Let's talk about the reality.

The reality is that the Taliban controlled the entire city outside of the airport. And when your enemy controls 99 percent of the country that you are trying to evacuate, unfortunately, many of the decisions about how the evacuation goes and how efficient or effective it is are outside of your control.

The idea that in 2 weeks we were going to be able to manage a seamless evacuation of the country, when our enemy controlled 99 percent of it, is ludicrous.

Again, there is no doubt that things could have been done better. But in the end, we got 130,000 Americans out. We were very creative about the means and the methods by which we used to get our people home.

Another criticism is that the President didn't get everybody out. Well, let's just remember what happened in the months leading up to the evacuation. Nineteen different times, the Biden administration told Americans who were there that things were going to get bad, and they should leave. Now, that doesn't mean that we shouldn't do everything within our power to try to get those Americans out who didn't listen to those reminders. But it does mean that the President doesn't bear all of the blame for those who stayed after having reminded them over a dozen times that it was probably time to leave.

It is a little difficult to hear this righteous indignation from Republicans about the President not getting more Afghans out when it is the Republican Party that is standing in the way of these refugees coming to the United States. Many of the same critics of the President's Afghanistan policy are the exact same Republicans who are right now saying that their State isn't going to take any Afghan refugees.

You can't have it both ways. You can't criticize the President for not getting more of our partners out but then say that they shouldn't go any further than an airplane hangar in Doha, that your State isn't going to take any of these evacuees, any of these refugees.

And, lastly, the most recent argument by this "execute better" crowd—the folks who think that, just like we could have succeeded in Afghanistan if we stayed another 10 years, we could have run a perfect and beautiful-looking evacuation in the midst of a country in chaos—is that America could have stayed indefinitely because the option somehow became much less costly and much less risky in 2021. These are the folks who say we should have kept a couple thousand troops there, and everything would have been fine.

President Trump negotiated with the Taliban. The deal was that he would

draw down to 2,500 troops and then everybody else would leave in 2021. In exchange, the Taliban said: We won't attack U.S. forces, and we will not advance on provincial capitals.

So when Joe Biden came to office, that was his reality. There were only a couple thousand troops left. The Taliban had gobbled up immense amounts of territory during the Trump administration, and they stood right outside of these capitals. Had Joe Biden chosen to walk away from that deal, hostilities would have begun between the United States and the Taliban. And I have listened to generals tell us for the last 10 years that there is no way that the United States could protect its own forces and stand up an effective Afghan military operation with less than 8,500. All of a sudden—all of a sudden—2,500 was enough, when for years the military was telling us, if you get down below 10,000, you are in big trouble.

But that doesn't even speak to the new reality that greeted us in 2021. That was the Taliban now not just out in the hinterlands, not just fighting for control of rural Afghanistan but on the precipice of these cities, ready to get involved in complicated, deadly, urban warfare. That argues for the number not being 8,500 but being twice that or three times that likely would have been necessary in order to buttress and stand up and support the Afghan military when street fighting happened inside these provincial capitals. Twenty-five hundred wasn't going to be enough.

Of course, the real desire for most of these "execute better" thinkers was for America to just stay. Now, I know folks bristle at this phrase "forever war." A lot of folks say that we should have kept 2,500, 5,000 there. They say that we weren't going to stay forever. They just say we should stay until we finish the job, which is defined as establishing an American-style representative government and an American-style unified military command. But if we couldn't accomplish that in 20 years—the longest U.S. war in history—why on Earth do we think that things would have changed after another 5 or another 10? My belief is that the goal that we set out was, unfortunately, impossible, which is why that PowerPoint slide reads, we stay in Afghanistan until it is stable; while reality reads, stay forever.

It is worth reminding that Americans overwhelmingly supported this plan to withdraw because they had seen how the plans never matched up with reality on the ground, and it was ultimately their sons' and daughters' blood that was going to be spilled. It was their money that was going to be spent.

The real danger is casually coming to this collective American conclusion that, just like our occupation was possible but executed poorly, that the withdrawal was simply a failure of planning, rather than an inevitability,

given the circumstances handed to President Biden and his team.

There are some military missions that cannot be completed, no matter how smart the planners are. This lesson has got to be learned or we are destined to suffer more Iraqs and more Afghanistans.

Finally, I will end with this: It is worth noting—and I said this earlier—that just because the mission we set out to achieve in Afghanistan was not possible, that that doesn't mean that everything else is impossible. That doesn't mean that America can't be a force for good in the world.

Our experience in Afghanistan is not a reason to disappear from global engagement. Just because this big thing wasn't possible doesn't mean that every big thing is impossible.

And so my hope is that by withdrawing from Afghanistan, we allow for the Biden administration and administrations to follow to be able to pivot to contests and fights that we can win, to put more effort into contesting Chinese expansionism, or to put more effort into providing nonmilitary aid to organic local democracy movements, or being more of a force for economic empowerment in the developing world. These are goals that are difficult, but they are achievable.

So there are plenty of negative consequences to our withdrawal from Afghanistan, but there are also beneficial consequences as well.

The greatest benefit is that we now have this energy and money and manpower that has been devoted to this failing mission for 20 years that can now be directed to these more achievable and more worthwhile goals, but only if we cure ourselves of this "execute better" mentality that is often connected to our military intervention. I think that is necessary so that America never again gets distracted from achievable goals by another impossible Afghanistan-like mission.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that after the first cloture vote on the Medina nomination, that the other three be 10-minute votes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I know of no other debate before the Senate.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the

Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 324, Monica P. Medina, of Maryland, to be Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs.

Charles E. Schumer, Robert Menendez, Patrick J. Leahy, Patty Murray, Maria Cantwell, Sheldon Whitehouse, Brian Schatz, Debbie Stabenow, Catherine Cortez Masto, Christopher A. Coons, Ron Wyden, Margaret Wood Hassan, Edward J. Markey, Benjamin L. Cardin, Richard J. Durbin, Tina Smith, Elizabeth Warren, Angus S. King, Jr.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Monica P. Medina, of Maryland, to be Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mrs. FEINSTEIN), the Senator from Virginia (Mr. Kaine), and the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) are necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN), the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. BURR), the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. CASSIDY), the Senator from Montana (Mr. DAINES), the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE), the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. JOHNSON), the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. KENNEDY), the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN), the Senator from Idaho (Mr. RISCH), the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. ROUNDS), the Senator from Florida (Mr. RUBIO), the Senator from Florida (Mr. SCOTT), the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS), and the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. TOOMEY).

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 57, nays 26, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 381 Ex.]

YEAS—57

Baldwin	Hassan	Peters
Bennet	Heinrich	Portman
Blumenthal	Hickenlooper	Reed
Blunt	Hirono	Romney
Booker	Kelly	Rosen
Brown	King	Schatz
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Schumer
Capito	Leahy	Shaheen
Cardin	Lujan	Sinema
Carper	Manchin	Smith
Casey	Markey	Stabenow
Collins	McConnell	Sullivan
Coons	Menendez	Tester
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Van Hollen
Crapo	Murkowski	Warner
Duckworth	Murphy	Warnock
Durbin	Murray	Warren
Gillibrand	Ossoff	Whitehouse
Graham	Padilla	Wyden

NAYS—26

Barrasso	Ernst	Lankford
Boozman	Fischer	Lee
Braun	Grassley	Lummis
Cornyn	Hagerty	Marshall
Cotton	Hawley	Paul
Cramer	Hoehn	Sasse
Cruz	Hyde-Smith	